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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 000972

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [CASC](#) [ASEC](#) [KDEM](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA -- POSSIBLE EFFECTS ON AMERICANS, AND WHAT THE EMBASSY IS DOING

REF: A. ABUJA 904

[B](#). ABUJA 865

[C](#). ABUJA 828

[D](#). LAGOS 1131

[E](#). LAGOS 902

CLASSIFIED BY AMBASSADOR JOHN CAMPBELL FOR REASONS 1.5 (b) and (d).

[1](#). (U) Summary: Serious ethnic violence has continued for some time in various parts of Nigeria, most prominently in the Delta, Plateau State and Benue State. Various armed militias competing for resources and manipulated by politicians continue to fight there and elsewhere, while mobs have channeled economic anger to attack their neighbors from other ethnic groups/religions in Kano and now Kebbi. Americans in northern Nigeria have not been caught up in these ethnic/economic conflicts, although two Americans were killed in unrelated Delta violence in April. As the weekend's events in Saudi Arabia remind, there is also the ever-present possibility of terrorism aimed at Americans.

[2](#). (C) The Embassy has undertaken many efforts to warn Americans, to provide added security to many Americans resident in Nigeria, and to tighten up our precautions. Below we update some of the hotspots, their possible effects on Americans in Nigeria, and what the Embassy is doing about them. End Summary.

VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA

[3](#). (C) PLATEAU STATE: The violence continues, and State of Emergency Sole Administrator Alli is continuing his visits to communities and leaders (Ref A). Some Yelwa-Shendam residents attempted to return to their homes over the weekend, but Tarok militiamen masquerading as police ambushed the returnees and killed several. The issue in Plateau is a fight between cattlemen (mostly Hausa/Fulani Muslims) and farmers (especially Taroks, most of whom are Christian) over land. It has been going on for years, but has killed hundreds since February. Given the particular ethnic groups involved, the fight has taken on religious overtones that are used by mobs seeking "revenge" elsewhere, most notably Kano. The fight in Plateau, however, is economic and is being stirred by politicians for their own political gains. The underlying economic issue of land rights cannot be resolved in Nigeria's legal system (Ref C).

[4](#). (U) JEGA: Another "revenge" mob attack occurred May 28 in the highway town of Jega, Kebbi State. A Christian Igbo went to the mosque during Friday prayers to learn if plans to attack Igbos were being discussed. The worshippers noticed he was not praying, asked him to pray and thus show he was a Muslim, and when he could not they attacked him. He was badly beaten. Another Igbo who went to help him was killed. The mob attacked the highway town's market dominated by Igbos, and a Muslim attacker was also killed. Up to eight churches were burned. 150-200 people were arrested, and the violence was only contained by personal intervention from Governor Aliero. Both Christians and Muslims praised Aliero for his quick action to calm hostilities.

[5](#). (U) BENUE: Fighting continues in the eastern part of Benue State between Tiv and Jukun militias, similar to the land-use war of militias in Plateau. The militias in Benue are not related to those in Plateau, but the political manipulation is similar to that in Plateau -- a rivalry between PDP and ANPP local politicians. At least 70 persons have been killed over the past ten days in the area (Ref B), which saw similar fighting and a massacre of civilians by the Nigerian military at Zaki Biam in 2001. The Army has been staying out of the militias' war so far this time, and most of the killings this time have been attributed to a militia called the Tiv Defense Corps. The Benue State assembly is debating whether to request a State of Emergency from President Obasanjo similar to the one in Plateau State.

[6](#). (C) DELTA: The oil-rich Niger Delta region has been the scene of on-going militia fighting for several years. There was a new flare-up of gang violence near Port Harcourt, Rivers State, last week (Ref D). Meanwhile, Delta State Governor Ibori has reportedly announced both a "special security operation" against the combatants and a truce

between the ethnic militias. Both the well-armed ethnic militias and the gangs are fighting for "market share" in the illegal theft of crude oil, a multi-million dollar industry.

AMERICANS AND VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA

17. (C) Two Americans were among seven killed near Warri, Delta State, on April 23 by unknown assailants apparently intent on robbery (Ref E). There are many Americans working in the Delta, and ChevronTexaco and other American employers have also received threats to their facilities there for essentially extortion purposes. Other than that, mercifully, Americans in Nigeria thus far have neither been targeted nor injured in the many ongoing wars in various parts of the country between militias. Outside the Delta, there are few if any resident Americans in the areas where militias are fighting each other for land rights, and the Americans living in cities like Kano have stayed out of the "revenge" mob violence there.

18. (C) The Embassy issued Warden Messages on May 25, May 18, May 12, April 24 and February 25 to keep the community informed, and would have sent another on May 28 to update some of the various hotspots listed above. In addition, we have kept an ever-watchful eye on the potential for terrorism in Nigeria, including informing the community of the March 24 world-wide caution. We have been especially concerned about soft targets, such as the American missionaries scattered across Nigeria and groups of them in a few cities such as Jos. The recent attack in Saudi Arabia was a further impetus to vigilance.

19. (C) The Embassy has taken steps to protect the community as well as keep it alert. These steps include upgrading surveillance detection at official USG buildings and the American International School, providing a "React" vehicle escort for the Embassy employee association-operated school bus, and gaining police protection for the missionary compound in Jos. These measures and the heightened awareness have kept the American community relatively calm, given the ongoing militia violence in many areas of Nigeria and the ever-present possibility of terrorism here as elsewhere.

CAMPBELL